Potiphar Buss Stays Home

BY WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY.

Love in a Losing Struggle With Poverty and Despair.

IT was in the late nineties that Potiphar Buss came to us—a seedy little man, as bald as an egg. Tramp printer though he may have been, he became a fixture in our country print shop; and, with the happy combination of Potiphar Buss and the old drum press, we could always be sure of getting out a paper.

The years have come and gone with Potiphar Buss sitting on a high stool in our ad alley, a cob pipe upside down in his toothless gums, his vest unbuttoned, his cracked spectacles near the end of a cauliflower nose and his right hand swinging deftly over the case with cuff stud loosed and wristband dragging.

"Well," he commented the first night as he washed with the rest of us around the battered corner sink, "this looks like a good place and I guess I'll stick. All the same, some day I'm goin' to take a trip around the world!"

He said it in 1898; he said it in 1908; he said it in 1918. But something always prevented him from realizing that great ambition.

One day, in the spring of 1919, we returned from dinner to find waiting around our office a young man who looked as though he had contracted all the brands of hard luck loosed on the world. The Robbins boy's face was pitiful because, aside from the lines of anxiety and wistfulness which should never show on the features of a boy, his right eye was almost white—going bad from cataract. The lad's clothes looked as though they had been slept in for a thousand nights; he needed shaving; his hair was unkempt and curled down over a soiled collar from beneath a rusty cap. His age couldn't have been 20; his face was that of an old, old man.

"Say, now, please can I have work?" he implored us. "I'll do anything if you'll pay me money. Please can I have work?"

Sam Hod, the proprietor, looked the boy over keenly. Drink wasn't responsible for such a condition.

"Where you from?" he demanded.

"I, now, come from Maryland. I been working on and off • • • lots of places. But, now, I'll work faithful • • • I promise I will! I'll try my hardest to stick to a steady job."

Sam said to Fred Osgood, the local real estate man—who was in the office to advertise for a bunch of lost keys:

"Something wrong with that boy, Fred; screw loose somewhere." He turned back to the lad. "Do you know the printer's trade? Can you set ads?"

"Yes, sir!" the boy responded eagerly.

"All right! We'll see! Take him into the back room, Bill. Turn him over to Potiphar Buss."

"And now the wages?" asked the boy. "How much money can you let me have?"

"Nine dollars a week ought to be pretty good pay for a lad of your years—not worth much more than an apprentice."

The lad's disappointment was pathetic.

"You, now, couldn't make it twelve?"

"Why," exclaimed Sam, "I can get half the boys in town for nine dollars a week to start. Why do you want twelve?"

"I—now—well, never mind! I'd rather have nine than nothing. But if I work hard I wish you'd make it twelve."

"We'll see how well you know your business first. Here's this ad for the classified columns Mr. Osgood's just written. Old Potiphar will show you the case of six-point. Tell him I said to put you setting the classifieds for today's paper."

* * * *

THE boy went out; was duly presented to Potiphar and loaned one of the latter's black aprons. He climbed upon a stool and started setting the classifieds. It was only a little four-line advertisement, saying that Fred Osgood had lost a keyring with a metal tag marked "L. C. Stevens." But he required the balance of the afternoon to finish it.

While the last forms were being locked and we were standing around watching the paper go to press, he said to old man Buss:

"How does it happen a man named Osgood is advertising for keys marked Stevens?"

"They probably belong to the old Stevens' property out on the North Foxboro road," replied Potiphar. "Fred's caretaker for the property, winters. The Stevenses go to New York durin' snow times."

"And leave it furnished?"

"Yeah," returned the other, impatiently. He was intent on a clothing ad that refused to "lift."

That night as we were washing up the pressman asked the new boy:

"Where you livin', sonny?"

"Nowhere—yet!" the boy replied.

"Come over with me t' Mis' Mathers—she'll take you in," said Potiphar Buss. "The paper's got an arrangement with her to board its help. If they don't have t' price, the widder takes it out in advertisin'."

It was Friday morning that "Blink" Robbins—as the boys and girls called him because of his optical affliction—started his tryout. We had finally to admit that the lad was impossible.

He was trying desperately to make good. But he couldn't see to do his work. He had to hunt the copy and his type case over with his one good eye, and that took time. He ran into things or knocked over galleys or forms or live advertisements on his blind side.

It would require courage to get rid of him, for up in these little hill towns we do not discharge our employes with the sang froid of the cities. At last, one Saturday afternoon, as kindly as he could, Sam called the lad aside, gave him nine dollars and broke it to him gently.

"Suppose, sonny, you sort of take your time and look around. See if you can't connect with something else to do——"

"You mean, now, that I'm fired?" he whispered with a gulp.

"Not exactly fired—yet. You can stay around and work a spell until you find another place. But—don't be too long about getting it."

He worked the next week blindly, without spirit, utterly broken. He grew into such a nuisance around the office we contemplated giving him $20 and telling him to pull his freight—anywhere—so long as he got from underfoot. Meeting Mrs. Mathers on the street, Sam told her he could not be responsible for the fellow's board another week.

"Why he only stayed with me four days!" exclaimed that lady. "I don't know where he went or where he's living."

Saturday came. The office girl figured the $20 into the payroll, drew a check to cover the whole, cashed it at Judge Farmer's bank, and left the money in the green box-safe to go to lunch.

When she came back the money drawer was empty—to the last tarnished cent. The lock had always been faulty.

The Robbins boy did not cime back for his pay envelope.

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THE following Monday noon, about 12:30, old Potiphar Buss came back early from his luncheon. He went into the back room, hung his coat and hat on the hook, and mounted his stool to read.

He was attracted by the printer's apron he had loaned the Robbins boy, hanging beside the window. Out of the front pocket protruded a bunch of old envelopes.

Puzzled, Potiphar went across and took them out. A glance told him they belonged to the Robbins boy. There were a dozen, frayed and soiled—common stamped post office envelopes—which appeared to have been carried around in the lad's pocket a year and a day. They all bore a Baltimore post mark, and the different addresses disclosed the boy's desperate search for employment.

Curiosity mingled with compassion prompted the old printer to put the letters in chronological order according to the post marks. Then he adjusted his spectacles and drew the first one forth.

The mail had been carried in the boy's pocket so long that some words had to be supplied. Nevertheless, Mr. Buss made them out, letter after letter. And when he reached the last he drew off his spectacles. The hand holding them fell to his fat little lap. His lack-luster eyes stared straight ahead, fixed on vague distance.

"Poor son of a gun!" he whispered. "Poor young son of a gun! Almost believe I'd steal a payroll for that m'self!"

Finally he restored the spectacles to his nose and drew out again the second to the last message. He read again these words:

"——I don't believe a word you say about living in any old empty country house to save expenses. I might have believed it once, perhaps. But not after you've had such a long time as this in which to get settled. You simply don't want me with you——"

"Empty country house!" whispered Potiphar Buss. "What old house could he have found and took t' livin' in?" Then his jaw dropped. "Could it be possible that pore young coot found Fred Osgood's keys?"

The help returned at 1 o'clock, but Potiphar Buss said nothing about the letters. But he did his work half-heartedly that afternoon.

The sun went down about 4:30. A dreary wind blew up and overcast the sky with clouds. Six o'clock came. The boys and girls laid down their work; the motors on the linotypes died away; came the usual jostling around the sink for the rail wash-up. Only this night the talk was all about the robbery and the whereabouts of the Robbins boy. Potiphar bent over his typecase, his face a troubled study, lost in poignant thought.

Finally he went to his boarding place and got his supper. The clouds gave down a murky drizzle. The going under foot was slushy and disagreeable. Nevertheless, after supper he buttoned his coat about his fat little stomach, fortified himself with a pipe of fresh tobacco, took his baggy green umbrella and started out.

Down School Street he went; across Mill; over the "flats" until he left the town behind him. There were no street lights out along the North Foxboro road. The going was frightful. The wind and the rain tossed his old umbrella. He stepped in freezing puddles. But his pipe burned cheerily and he relieved his spirits with good four-syllable cuss words when he floundered in a hole.

* * * *

IT was an eerie place—that old Stevens House—as the printer drew near in the darkness. To come upon it in a rainy night in search of a young thief was a job for a man with strong nerves. Potiphar thought only of what he had read in those grubby letters.

He entered the yard. He went up on the creaking veranda. He fumbled in his vest, found a match, struck it.

By its light he saw only the naked flooring, the closed storm doors, the drawn and fastened blinds barnacled with cobwebs.

Potiphar tried the door. It was locked. He went to the front windows and tried them vainly also.

He was about to go off the plazza to try the back door when a lull came in the wind moaning through the naked maples along the road. In that silence the blood of Potiphar Buss ran cold. For he had heard a sound—a weird wild cry that came from inside that tenantless pile above him.

It was a human voice. It came again. It was crying a name!

The wind started up. Unearthly sounds seemed groaning along the gate.

Then came another lull...and the cry...clear, agonizing, hysterical, terrible.

"Mary!"

Potiphar picked up his fat old umbrella, went down the steps and began feeling his way around to the rear of the house.

At length he found a kitchen window that responded to an upward push. And fat little Potiphar Buss crawled up somehow and spilled over the sill inside. He lowered the window behind him and listened. He listened a long time, fearing to strike a match.

"Mary!" came a moan again—a cry of anguish, the whole trailing off into senseless babble.

"I'm right!" exclaimed the printer. "The boy's in this house and either gone daft or powerful sick!"

Mr. Buss struck his match. The kitchen in which he stood was furnished for summer occupancy. On the shelf over the dry and rusted sink, he saw a small brass lamp. He crossed and shook it. The base held oil. He dabbed the wick and replaced the chimney.

Then through the strange house Potiphar started on tiptoe.

Outside one door he finally listened to senseless raving going on within.

"Georgie!" he cried. "Its only me . . . Potiphar Buss from the printing office! Don't be scared, Georgie—its only Potiphar Buss!"

Pushng open the door into a small bedroom the printer peered within.

The boy tossed on a sheetless bed, with a couple of old blankets for covering. He rolled over when Potiphar entered and his eyes were glassy hard.

"It's only Mr. Potiphar Buss," commented the boy as if there was nothing unusual about his being there . . . "—good old Potiphar Buss! Oh, I know you, Potiphar Buss! You gave me two dollars to get some food last week! Mary . . . this is Potiphar Buss . . . from the printing office—he's a good old scout, Potiphar Buss——"

The printer was startled. For a moment he believed a third person to be in the room. Then he realized it was only delirium. Potiphar came in and closed the door. Curtain and blinds were drawn. No one could see the light from the road. So he set down the lamp.

"I see you found Fred Osgood's keys," he remarked sociably.

"No, I didn't find 'em. Some one answered the ad—and brought 'em in that next noontime . . . when I was in the office, alone. They left 'em with me for the bookkeeper. But I had an idea I could save money . . . and . . . Mary, this is Mr. Potiphar Buss of the printing office—Potiphar Buss I wrote you about!. He's a good old man. Mr. Potiphar Buss!"

"Yes, yes!" cried the printer, striving to sooth the boy by his tone.

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POTIPHAR sat down by the sick boy's bed. For a long time he sat there, only the smoky old lamp lighting the scene. By piecing together parts of the tale which came out during the interludes of sanity, the old printer finally got the story.

"Was you ever in love, Mr. Buss, • • • in love with a girl that was sweet and pretty . . . and loved you in return?"

Potiphar was silent. But his withered lips closed hard. And the pathos of the boy's past came up before him.

"We was all alone in the world, Mr. Buss . . . she and I! I was only seventeen. She was twenty . . . going on twenty-one——"

"And probably twice as old and wise for all that!" thought Potiphar grimly.

"—but that difference in our ages wasn't nothin', Mr. Buss . . . She loved me and I loved her . . . she worked in a candy factory . . . I worked in a newspaper office. That was while I was learning my trade. After I'd learned my trade I was goin' to take a job somewhere at man's wages . . . and send for her . . . and we'd be happy . . . together."

The printer nodded.

"The night before I came to go away we took a long walk, Mr. Buss . . . we come to the edge of the bay across from the city. It was sort o' a misty evening, Mr. Buss. All the world was raw and cold and lonesome . . . an' we looked at the light of the city across the water and it seemed as if it was we two against the whole world . . . there was nobody to mind, nobody to care. And a great big homesickness came over me then, Mr. Buss. I was afraid something would happen—that I'd lose her. I said, 'Mary . . . let's get married tonight . . . and when I've landed that job up in New England I'll send for you—' "

"You didn't have the money t' take her with yeh?" asked Potiphar.

"No, only had the money for the minister and the license and my railroad fare t' the job. And I married her that night . . . it seems years ago! . . . and it was all over so soon . . . I was frightened—"

"An' yet it was bindin'! . . . bindin' f'r life!" thought Potiphar. "Many a good man's been ruined by havin' two dollars handy f'r a marriage license!"

"I went away and took the job, Mr. Buss. You understand how it was! They thought I was a man . . . from my letters. When they saw I was only about 17 they refused me man's wages."

"And yer wife kept writin' wantin' to know why she couldn't join you—"

"That's it, Mr. Buss. And she was afraid to leave her job in the factory. She might not get another."

Potiphar thought of the long, closely-written letters full of love and endearment and youthful hope and pitiful aspiration, the first he had read that noontime. Then he remembered how they had dwindled. The boy's broken voice was going on feverishly again:

"I tried to make her understand, Mr. Buss. But she said I'd stopped lovin' her. She said I was spendin' my wages on myself . . . that I didn't want her to come on . . . that she'd ruined her life marrin' me on impulse . . . I didn't never intend to send for her."

"I understand, bud," said Potiphar Buss.

"I worked hard! God! how I tried' . . . my eye botherin' me more and more all the time——"

The old printer sat stiffly with his chubby hands on his seedy little knees his gaze far away. Verily he knew. Even if the boy had been given the promised pay, when divided by two and the young wife's share sent to help with the bills of her young motherhood, there would have been little indeed for the fare to bring them together, or to buy furnishings for a home. The lad had problems which only a strong man should know.

"But every week I sent her all I could," the boy sobped on. "I tried to get 'em to raise my pay but they never could understand. I was getting as much as most boys of my age . . . why shouldn't I be satisfied. But they laughed at me and said a boy of my age had no business with a baby. Then they got mad and said business was business and if I didn't like what they was payin' me, I could get out!"

"Which you did?"

"I just had to!" replied the boy. "I got another job and another! but it was always the same. I had a man's expenses but they'd only pay me a boy's wages, never mind how hard I worked . . . And my eye was goin' badder and badder all the time."

* * * *

POTIPHAR thought of the hard, strange ring he had detected in the last three of the girl's letters. He thought of the long list of the baby's outfit—which he had read with an ache in his own heart—as the woman had written it . . . and her expenses which were mounting up, which again no boy should know. And Potiphar Buss verity understood. "Why didn't the boy want his wife and baby up there with him?"—in a score of places the distraught woman's query had sounded. And the grown man saw that the boy had not told her of his poor luck, of the injustice of his wages, of his trampings across country to get the better job and find a way out with his overburdened heart a leaden thing. Finally he remembered the ultimatum in the last letter—the letter the boy must have received while working at the local newspaper office—the doctor from the institution had said it was only a question of time . . . the little son's death might be averted if certain things, all costing money, were provided—and the letter no longer contained endearing epithets or outlined the future enshrined in a glorified mist. Indeed, it intimated many wild, foolish and shameful things which she would do before she'd see the baby die. And it must have prodded like a sharp bodkin into the boy's naked heart.

"——and you stole Sam's payroll t' save your baby's life?" suggested Potiphar Buss.

"There wasn't any other way," replied the boy.

"But you might know you'd get arrested."

"I'd got to the place where I didn't care!"

"Where's the money, bub?"

"I mailed it to her a few minutes after I took it. Oh, I wish I would die. I'm only standin' in her way. Maybe with me gone she could marry some one who'd take care of her . . . her and the baby. She could get married again. Besides, the baby—my little baby—mustn't have a father in jail! It was the only way out—takin' the money. I just got to the end of my rope—the very, very end! Oh, God! if I'd only had a chance;"

Potiphar sat staring blankly at the opposite wall. On the cot the boy groaned with the fire in his blood—the greater burn in his heart—the father who was too young to be entitled to a baby—the little son he had never seen.

Did it come to the old man's father-heart in that moment—the heart stunted and disappointed by his abnormal bachelor existence during long years of loneliness—the agony and worry and tragedy in the heart of the boy? What could it have been that made Mr. Potiphar Buss sit so silently by the strange bed of illness, with the stark sorrow in his hazy old eyes?

It must have been toward 4 o'clock in the morning that the boy came back to consciousness.

"Sonny," said the old printer, his voice uneven, "you can't stay here; it ain't your home and some one might come. You got t' spruce up and try t' walk a piece. You got to lemme help you back to town."

The boy was a bit more sane.

"I stole money," he said in a hollow voice. "I'm a thief an' they're after me. It's better I die——"

"No, no sonny—no, it ain't!" declared Mr. Potiphar Buss. "I'll make it all right. You trust old Potiphar. See if you can stand, sonny. Old Potiphar will help you back t' town. F'r you've got t' go back. You'll perish here. And you mustn't perish. No, you mustn't perish! Old Potiphar won't have it. Besides, there's the wife—and the baby!"

"Oh, well, I'll go back and give myself up, I guess. I s'pose it's right I should."

"Old Potiphar will fix it, sonny. Trust old Potiphar to fix it!"

"You really mean it? You ain't kiddin' me, are you?"

"Potiphar Buss never kids, bub—Potiphar Buss never kids!"

They came up Main street in the silent dawn. They met no one. The boy almost succumbed to the exertion. But for that matter, so did Potiphar.

He took the lad into the boarding house just as the widow was arising to prepare early breakfast.

"I hardly know which o' the two of us is the sickest, him or me," he said with a wry humor, as motherly Mrs. Mathers, with exclamations of amazement and compassion, helped him to get the nearly unconscious boy to bed.

"You call Dr. Johnson, Mis' Mathers," ordered the printer. "Me—I'm goin' up right away to see Sam Hod."

* * * *

HE roused Sam out of bed and made him come down. The editor flung on a bathrobe and faced his moth-eaten employe across the table of the chilly dining room.

Potiphar took a fat little wallet—fat, yet battered with life like himself—from his coat pocket. He counted out nine $10 bills and shoved them across to Sam.

"It's your payroll, Hod. I made the boy give it back." lied Mr. Buss stoically. "He's restored your money, now you can't hold him any longer or prosecute him——" and Potiphar told where and how the boy was found.

"Yes, I can!" declared Sam. "Even if he gave it back the fact remains he committed a felony——"

"No, no, Sam Hod! You won't prosecute him!"

"Why won't I, Potiphar Buss?"

"Prosecute him' Samuel Hod, and I—I—I quit you cold!"

Sam smiled weakly. Finally he said:

"Of course, if you feel that way about it, Pott——"

"IT SEEMED AS IF IT WAS WE TWO AGAINST THE WHOLE WORLD——"

"And you'll take him back?"

"No! I couldn't do that!"

"Then I quit you—I quit you cold, Samuel Hod!"

"But Potiphar—I——"

"I ain't much use in this world, Sam Hod. I won't never set the world on fire—now. All my life's gone by. Ain't got no folks t' mind when I'm gone, Sam Hod. I saved a little money to go 'round the world, but I might as well use it t' help some one make a success of his life if I ain't made much of a success of mine."

Sam was fully awake now and, staring at his old printer, aroused as he had never seen him aroused and never dreamed he could be aroused.

"I'm goin' to' send f'r his wife and little baby, Samuel How. I'm goin' t' loan him the money to furnish a little house. Then if it don't cost more'n I got, I'm goin' t' send him away an' see if them city doctors can't take that fuzz off his eye. When he comes back I want you should give him a regular job in the ad alley. Not an apprentice's job—not a boy's job—but a man's job at real man's wages."

To Sam's questions then Potiphar Buss told the boy's story and produced the pitiful letters in proof. He concluded by declaring:

"Ye see, it's this way, Sam Hod. I'm old and played out an' my life's gone to seed. I'm nothin' but an old tramp printer who's wasted his substance in riotous livin'. I allus been sorry I ain't got no folks to care about me or that I could do things for. Figgered it out as I sat by his bed last night that it's a sort o' duty I owe the old world to take a youngster like him and make a man of him, to take my place—only a better place—in society, when I'm gone. When I come to stand up 'fore God Almighty and He says to me: 'Potiphar Buss, what did you ever do in life that entitles you to a place in Paradise?' I want t' be able to say: 'There's a young chap I've left back on earth, God, that's growin' into the stature of a real man, a good father and an honest citizen. There's a woman back on earth, God, who's been saved from going wrong, a satisfied, happy young mother in a little house where love is, becos I butted into their affairs. And there's a little kid back on earth, God, whose life I saved with the substance I'd been selfishly hoardin' f'r worldly travel—growin' up to be a comfort and a blessin' to 'em both. That's my record, God, an' I hope it's strong enough to leave me stick around these heavenly parts a spell an' meet my folks that's somewheres around here that I won't be lonesome for, no more.' That's what I'm up to, Sam Hod, and I ask you sincerely not to hinder my alibi for my presence in Paradise."

"All right, Pott—fi that's the way you feel about it! Of course I'm not one to stand in your way!"

* * * *

THE next morning the charge against young Robbins was withdrawn. He had a good room in Mrs. Mathers' house, and the news that his wife and baby would be with him by the end of the week was greater than any physician's medicine. He began to mend.

And the next Saturday the boy's wife arrived. The old man had rented the furnished bungalow belonging to Fred Osgood on Cedar street and had it ready for them.

The girl got off the train with the baby on her arm. She was thin, emaciated, pretty in a pale, starved way, and her baby showed the effects of poverty and malnutrition. But you'd have thought that little red, weazened-up worm was worth a hundred thousand dollars the way the half-blind Robbins boy acted.

Mr. Potiphar Buss saw them safely housed in their bungalow and then he fled.

"I got to hustle back to the office and set an ad," he declared huskily.

But Mr. Potiphar Buss had told a little white fib. He did not have to hustle back to the office and set an ad.

Mr. Potiphar Buss went home in the early evening to his boarding house. Slowly he mounted the steep, narrow, creaking stairs and opened the door into his stuffy little chamber.

Having reached his room, he sat down on the edge of the bed. He took off his dented derby hat and laid it beside him. Finally came a sigh, a long-drawn sigh that trembled with pain. He moved across the room to a cluttered closet beside the chimney. He felt around until he located an out-of-date telescope valise. He went slowly back across the room to the west window and ran the curtain to the top, so that all the light from the afterglow of the sunset could illuminate what he held in his hands. Then in an ocean of time ehe untied the strings.

They were letters he held—letters bedimmed by the musty hand of Time and perfumed with the saffron scent of Long ago. Mr. Potiphar Buss opened them. One by one he read them. And in doing so, as he had done on countless nights in other years, he counted his rosary.

For the letters which he read were penned in a woman's hand. They were love letters—written in a time when Potiphar Buss was not old and gone-to-seed and bald as an egg. Shadows and night had closed down on the one who had penned them. Yet through the years the man had kept them, treasures which were sacred. Over the years they had been a solace when the cares and disappointments of life had weighed too heavily upon him. Letters once—now whispers from the dead.

The gnarled old printer read again those faded pages which had been written by one who had loved him in life's Springtime. And after a while he came to a photograph which he knew when he opened the packet he would come upon. From the faded old print there looked up at him the features of a young woman. And in the hollow of her arm there lay a little child.

"Mary! Mary!" he whispered in anguish, "if some one had only done the same for me!"

Mr. Poitphar Buss works each day in our office. Yesterday, having taken his cob pipe from his toothless gums, removed his spectacles and washed up at our sloppy old sink in the corner, he remarked, from force of habit: "Well, I ain't always goin' to do this. Some day I'm goin' to take a trip around the wor——" But he stopped in the middle of a word. He took down his coat. He put it on and went out.

"Oh, well," he mused, "it really don't matter! The parts I wanted most to see has all been shot to pieces, anyhow."

Down in Boston now there is a young man with a good pair of eyes, a commendable ambition, and a resolute determination to make good an old printer's altruism. A girl-wife with a song in her heart is helping him to make a success of his life, nad a ten-thousand-dollar child binds them both.

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THE BOY WAS DULY PRESENTED TO POTIPHAR.

PERSHING HAS NOTABLE RECORD OF U. S. SERVICE

(Continued from First Page.)

and the appointment was duly confirmed on December 6, 1906.

The same year Gen. Pershing was sent back to the Philippine Islands to break up a serious insurrection of the Moros. He succeeded in the course of a severe three-year campaign and returned to America to become commander of the Department of the Pacific, with headquarters at the Presidio, in San Francisco. Once more his leadership was to be sought in the active field, however, for trouble with Mexico began to roll up over the southern horizon, and Gen. Pershing was ordered to assume command of the 8th Brigade, with headquarters at Fort Bliss, Tex.

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PERSHING'S ability to prepare for action in a minute was never better demonstrated than on the occasion of his arrival at Fort Bliss. Scarcely had he completed an inspection of the forces that he was to command and sized up his men quickly, but carefully, when he tersely announced:

"I am ready to take the field on five minutes' notice."

Gen. Funston, who then commanded the Department of the Southwest, gave Pershing charge of the border patrol. Pancho Villa and his army of bandits roamed the broad State of Chihuahua, across the Rio Grande, at will, and it was a hard assignment, for runners were trying desperately every night to cross the border from this country with guns and ammunition.

It was while Pershing was in the midst of this work that the greatest tragedy of his life crushed him momentarily. He was called to headquarters and informed that his wife and two of his children, for whom he had already prepared a home at Fort Bliss and was only awaiting the coming of Fall to occupy it, had lost their lives in a fire at the Presidio.

With heavy heart Gen. Pershing went back to San Francisco and took the mortal remains of his family to Wyoming for burial. One son, Warren, had been rescued, and he Pershing intrusted to the care of a sister living in Lincoln, Neb., realizing that soon after his return to Fort Bliss he probably would be obliged to take the field again.

His presumption was soon proved to have been well founded. With a force of 16,000 picked men and sufficient supporting batteries of mountain and field artillery, one of his cavalry regiments incidentally being his own old 10th, Pershing crossed the border and pursued Villa's followers to the mountains of Chihuahua. Although he never succeeded in capturing the wily bandit chieftain himself, he did completely smash the force that had followed Villa, and restored peace and order along the border for the first time in years.

While Pershing was in the midst of these operations he was advanced to the rank of major general, the youngest man in the Army to hold that coveted grade. Confident that he had smashed the power of Villa once and for all, Pershing returned with his force to the United States. It wat not long after that that he received his call to the biggest assignment of his whole career—the command of the American Expeditionary Force in France.

On May 8, 1917, he was ordered to proceed from Fort Bliss to Washington, supposedly to take an active part in the training of the Army America was raising to send to Europe, war having already been declared. Immediately upon his arrival in the National Capital, however, Pershing was informed of the Government's secret plans, and on May 28 he was on his way to England.

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THE story of his arrival in London will live. He was received at Buckingham Palace by King George, who greeted him with this statement: "It has been the dream of my life to see the two great English-speaking nations more closely united. My dream has been realized. It is with the utmost pleasure that I welcome you, at the head of the American contingent, to our shores."

In Paris his reception was even more inspiring. Acclaimed by multitudes that cheered themselves hoarse, Gen. Pershing was escorted to the Invalides and there momentarily invested with the sword and cross of the Legion of Honor of Napoleon. No man had ever before even held those sacred relics of France's history in his hands, and the scene of the American general, standing in the dim, half light of the sepulcher, surrounded by the commanding marshals of France and the French President himself, invested for the moment with the most sacred bequests of the great Bonaparte, was tense and awe-inspiring.

The story of Pershing's overwhelming achievements in France has been told too often to need repeating here. It might be said, however, that several of the stories that have been attributed to him by well meaning persons were not altogether correct. For instance, he was not the author of that now famous sentence "Lafayette, we are here!" Pershing himself disclaimed credit for that statement, adding:

"About the only thing that I've been credited with saying that I ever really did say, is my statement that 'Germany can be beaten, Germany must be beaten, Germany will be beaten.'"

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PERHAPS one of the reasons for Gen. Pershing's success and personal ppoularity with the soldiers who fought under him was his genuine regard for their comfort. That all must fight and some must die he accepted as inevitable in warfare. But he always went out of his way to see that their comforts were as many as possible. An instance of this is cited to have occurred when the Americans were on their hard march upon the fortress of Metz.

An American colonel had ordered his regiment to stand aside while a train of empty trucks thundered past, en route in the same direction the men were going. They had marched long and hard that day and Gen. Pershing, who happened to be coming right behind the truck train in his own car, could not help noticing the envious looks the soldiers cast after the empty trucks. Halting in front of the colonel of the regiment, Pershing severely reprimanded the officer for not ordering the regiment to ride as far as the trucks were going, at least.

Few men living today have been decorated as many times as Gen. Pershing. He wears the highest medals for valor offered by virtually every nation in the world—the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor of France, the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, of Great Britain; the Grand Cross of the Order of Leopold, the highest honor within the gift of Belgium; the Congressional Medal of Honor, and the Order of the Rising Sun, of Japan.

Some of his other decorations are: Grand Cordon Order of the Paulawnia, Japan; the Croix de Guerre, Czecho Slovakia; the Order of Saint Savior, Greece; Grand Cross Order of St. Maurizio e Lazzaro and Military Order of the Savoy, Italy; Grand Cordon of Prince Danilo I and Obilitch Medal, Montenegro; Medal of La Solidaridad, Panama; several of the highest Chinese decorations and also the highest military medal of the new government of Poland, the last three having been conferred within the past year.

He holds honorary degrees from leading universities of both the Old and the New World—LL. D. from the University of Nebraska, the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, and Cambridge, and D. C. L., from Oxford. He is a 32° Mason and a member of the Metropolitan and the Army and Navy clubs.

Gen. Pershing retires from the Army as one of the seven men in the history of America to attain the rank of a full general. Washington was the first, Grant and Sherman were the next, and then came the appointment of Pershing and Tasker H. Bliss during the World War. Payton C. March was the seventh. The last two were emergency appointments.

U. S. NATIONAL ANTHEM 110 YEARS OLD TODAY

"THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER" was written 110 years ago last night—the night of September 13-14, 1814. Perhaps no famous song was written so "on the spur of the moment," and it equaled, if it did not surpass, the degree of instantaneous popular favor which was accorded the "Marseillaise."

Its author, Francis Scott Key of Georgetown, D. C., in whose memory a beautiful new bridge over the Potomac has recently been dedicated, wrote it while an eye-witness to a bombardment of Fort McHenry, one of the defenses of Baltimore, Md., during the war of 1812. He did not write it, however, while on the deck of a British man-of-war, as has been asserted, but on a little vessel called a "cartel," owned by our government and employed in Chesapeake Bay by an official having to do with the exchange of prisoners. Thus it possessed a neutral status.

All this is brought out in an old clipping from a newspaper of the 50's owned by Charles C. Glover of this city and through his courtesy made available for The Star. It consists of a long letter from Chief Justice Taney of the U. S. Supreme Court, who was a brother-in-law of Key. This letter, penned in 1856, sets forth in full the circumstances originating and attending the composition of the most famous of Key's songs, for he was the author of several.

In 1814, when the song was written, Mr. Key lived in Georgetown and Chief Justice Taney in Frederick. Soon after the British troops retired from Washington a British fleet anchored off Alexandria and caused its capitulation. Key, who was a member of a volunteer artillery company commanded by Maj. Peter of Georgetown, believed a water attack on Washington was imminent, and, of course, refused to leave. Mrs. Key remained with him, and Key's parents, who were in Frederick with the Taney's, became alarmed for them. Mr. Taney then went to Georgetown to persuade Mrs. Key and her children to depart. The water attack never materialized, however.

On the evening of the day the enemy vessels disappeared, says Judge Taney, a Mr. Richard West came to the Key home and told him that as the British troops had passed through Upper Marlboro, Dr. Beanes of that place, at whose commodious house a number of the British officers had quartered themselves, had been compelled to accompany the invaders, and carried as a prisoner on board the British fleet. After the British left town this physician had aided in capturing some stragglers. Their officers considered that he had in some way bound himself not to take up arms against them and they therefore sent back a detachment, which released the prisoners and seized the doctor, who was the family physician of Mr. West and an intimate friend of Mr. Key. West asked Key to obtain the sanction of the government to board the British admiral's ship under a flag of truce and see if he could not negotiate Dr. Beanes' release.

This Key readily agreed to do. Orders were issued to the little United States vessel mentioned before, which was then in Baltimore. Key hastened thither, boarded her, and met the enemy fleet at the mouth of the Potomac preparing for an attack on Baltimore.

"He was courteously received by Admiral Cochrane," Judge Taney writes that Key told him some ten days later, "but when he made known his business, his application was received so coldly that he feared it would fail. Gen. Ross, however, commander of the British army, who was so soon to meet his death, as a return for kindness shown by Dr. Beanes to British troops finally said that he would release him, but Mr. Key was at the same time informed that neither he nor any one else would be permitted to leave the fleet for some days and must be detained until the attack on Baltimore was over. He was assured that they would make him and Mr. Skinner, the United States official accompanying him, as comfortable as possible.

"Admiral Cochrane, with whom they dined on the day of their arrival

(Continued on Sixth Page.)